

Lecture 7 – “Children of the Light...Scattered Everywhere”: The Radicals of the Reformation

“As the most beautiful acts of the individual Christian will be those of which the world [has] no knowledge, so the most interesting operations of Christianity will be those which are unnoticed in general history, those which are performed in the quiet circle of family friends.” Johann Gottfried Herder

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.” Matthew 5:11

Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 6

Prayer

From Anabaptist hymn

“Our comfort this beneath the rod
Whenever we are faint,
In thee, O God, in Thee alone
Are earthly peace and rest.
Who hope on Thee, eternally
Are sustained and blessed. Amen.”

“Children of the Light...Scattered Everywhere”: The Radicals of the Reformation

I. Three Episodes

A. Inn of the Black Bear in Jena, August 22, 1524

1. Personae dramatis—Dr. Martin Luther and Dr. Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (Karlstadt)—not present: Thomas Müntzer and “the Allstedt Prophets”
2. The discussion over dinner
3. The issues
 - a. Radical versus moderate reform (“Luther broke the pope’s pitcher, but kept the pieces in his hands”)
 - b. Scripture versus direct guidance by the Holy Spirit (“He who has not the Spirit does not know how to say anything deeply about God, even if he has eaten through a hundred Bibles!”)
 - c. Inner renewal (regeneration) versus outer acceptance (justification)

B. Lake Constance, Zurich, January 21, 1525

1. Personae dramatis—Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, and some others—not present: Zwingli
2. The event: rebaptism (the birth of the Anabaptist movement)
3. The issues
 - a. Radical reform versus less radical reform (“The decision has already been made, the Spirit of God decides.”)
 - b. Believer’s baptism versus infant baptism (“The access and portal of a false Christianity”; “the highest and chief abomination of the pope”)
 - c. No tradition (Bible only) versus limited tradition
 - d. “Anti-Constantinian” versus “Constantinian” Christianity (“The sword of the state is outside the perfection of Christ.”)

4. The Schleitheim Confession, February 1527 (*“The Schleitheim Confession”—an abridged version is found in Placher)

C. The Disaster at Münster, 1535

See preface to Francis I in Calvin's 1536 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

II. Menno Simons (1496-1561)

A. *Foundation of Christian Doctrine* (1540)

B. Pacifism ("Moses and his successors, with their iron sword, have served out their time, and...Jesus Christ has now given us a new commandment.")

C. Separation from the world

D. "The Quiet in the Land"

III. The Anabaptist Heritage

A. Direct descendants (Mennonites, Amish, Brethren, etc.)

B. Indirect descendants (Baptists)

C. Distant cousins (all of us)

IV. The Radical Contribution

A. Separation of church and state ("The Two Kingdoms" by Hans Schnell)

Helmut Thielicke: "In his commentary on Genesis, Luther [used] a vivid picture. In the intact world of the original creation God could rule the world by simply lifting one finger. That was possible because humanity was so completely focused upon God and attended to every move he made, just as an orchestra concentrates upon the conductor and obediently follows every gesture he makes. At the fall, everything suddenly became different. When human beings turned away from God, they could no longer see God's gestures. Therefore, God must grab them with his fist in order to assert his will. The institutional form of this ruling fist is the state, according to Luther. Therefore the orders of history, such as the state, law, and the economy, are not to be understood as the original 'orders of creation.' They are rather a kind of 'emergency order' that is appropriate to the new situation of fallen humanity. One could also say that they are orders of the patience of God by virtue of which he ensures that the fallen world continues to exist and continues to make use of those means that are available to it and that have been instituted for its preservation and survival" ("The Godless World and the Wordless God" in *Festschrift for Geoffrey Bromiley*, 296).

B. Religious liberty—Conviction or necessity?

C. Separation from the world—"Christ against culture"?

H. Richard Niebuhr: "The Mennonites have come to represent the attitude [of Christ against culture] most purely, since they not only renounce all participation in politics and refuse to be drawn into military service, but follow their own distinctive customs and regulations in economics and education" (*Christ and Culture*, 56-57).

D. Suffering—"The conscience of the Reformation" ("A Broadside—The Beautiful Judgment of Two Young Noble Women from Delden who were Burned Two Miles from Deventer")

John Foxe to Queen Elizabeth on behalf of the persecuted Anabaptists: "I defend them not: these errors should be repressed....It is the manner of their punishment which shocks me. To burn up with fiery flame...the living bodies of wretched men who err through blindness of judgment rather than deliberate will is a hard thing and belongs more to the spirit of Rome than to the spirit of the gospel."

For Further Study

**The Radical Reformation*, George Williams

The standard work.

**Spiritual Life in Anabaptism* (1995), ed. Cornelius J. Dyck

Readings from Menno Simons, Marpeck, Hubmaier, and others on the spiritual life and its relation to prayer, Bible reading, church and work.